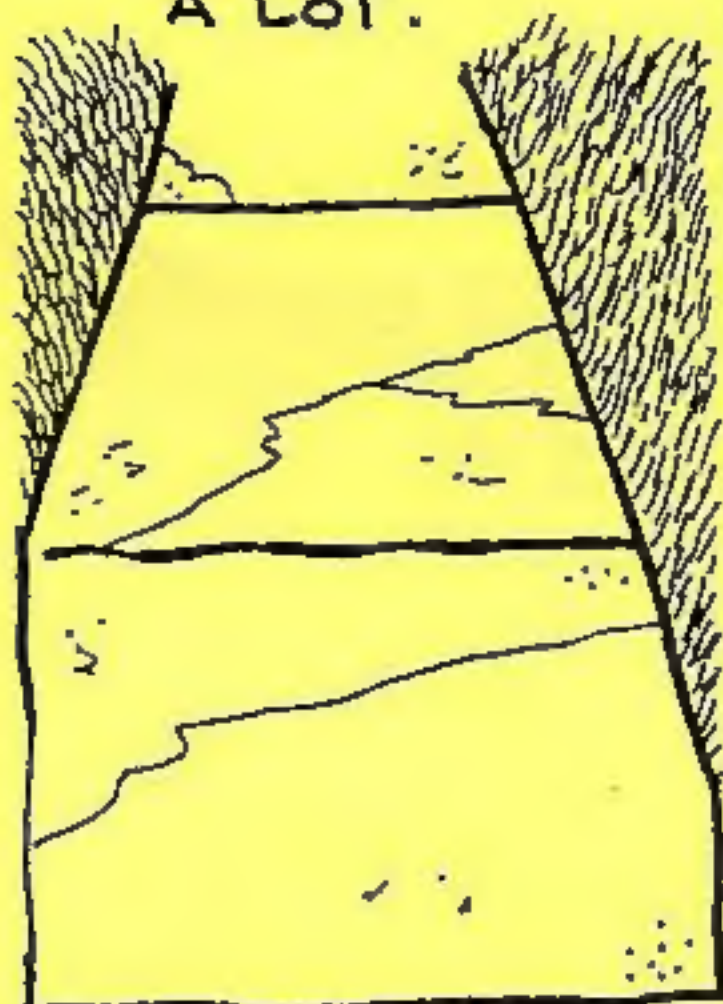
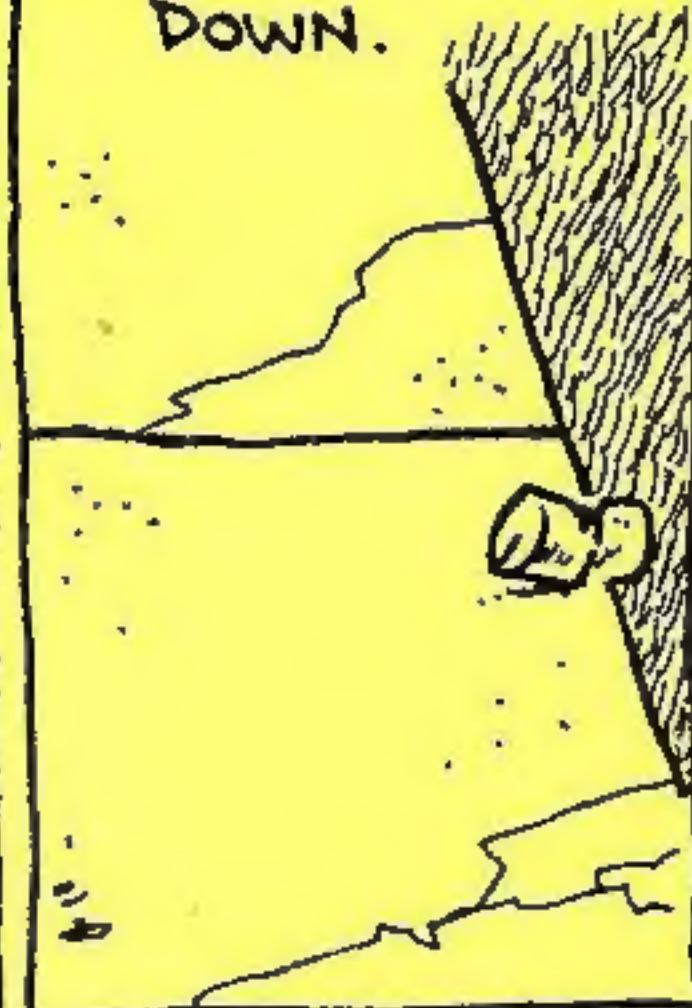


HE WALKS.
HE WALKS
A LOT.



HE WALKS A LOT
WITH HIS HEAD
DOWN.



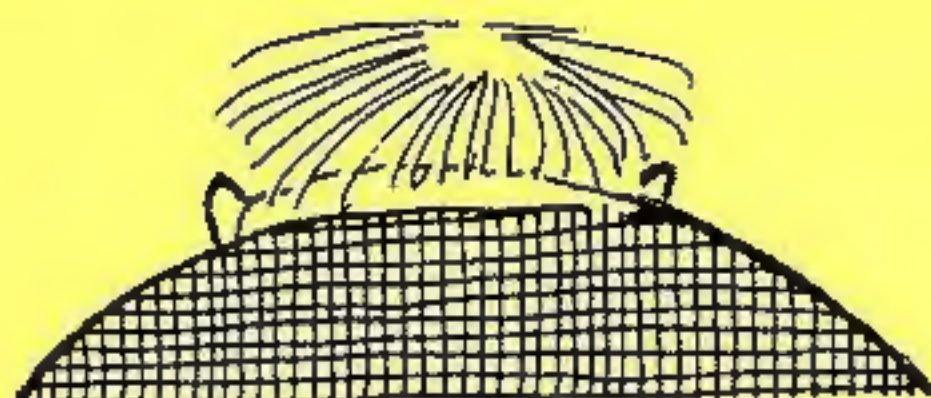
AND SO HE GETS TO
KNOW ALL THE CRACKS
IN THE SIDEWALKS, THE
DRIED SPOTS OF GUM.
THE NAMES OF CHILDREN
FINGERED IN MANY
YEARS AGO WHEN THE
CONCRETE WAS FIRST
POURED...

ZACH

... AND THE CAIMAN TRACKS
WITH THE POOLS OF BLOOD.



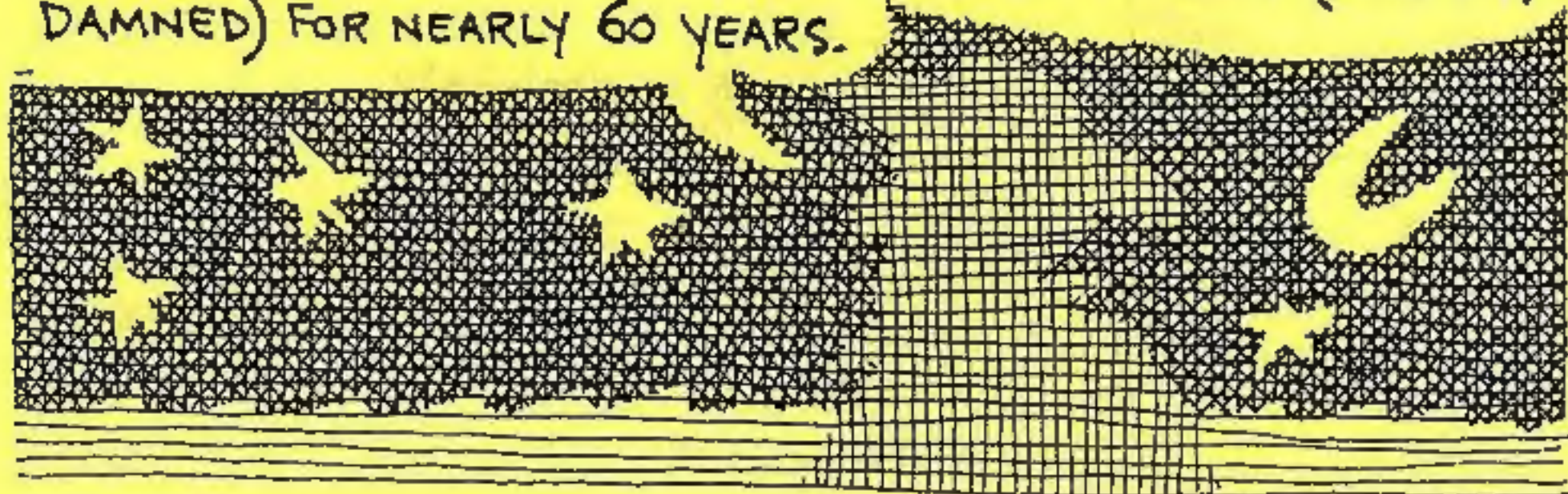
THOSE TRACKS STILL SHOCK
HIM, IN A DULL WAY. AND
HE'S THE ONE WHO STARTED
THE WHOLE THING. NOW YOU
KNOW WHY HE WALKS WITH
HIS HEAD DOWN...



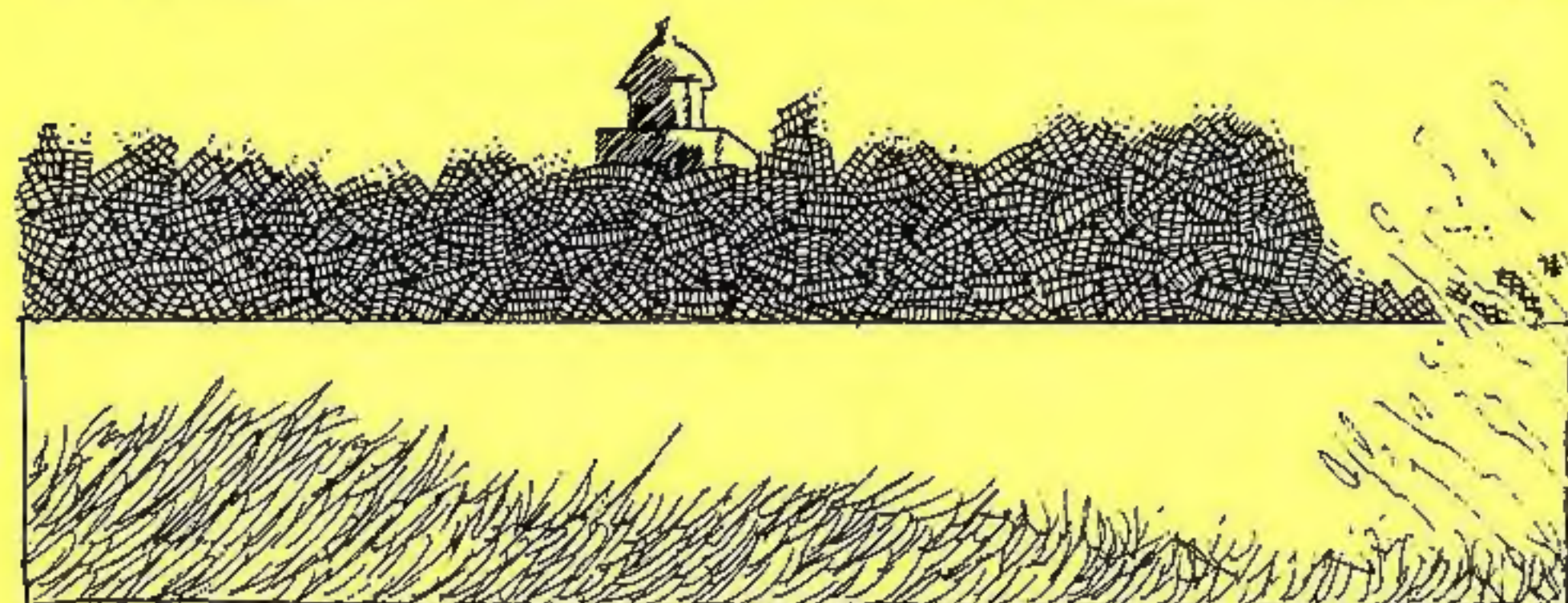
... FOR HE IS
WALKING ON
THE SIDEWALK
AROUND...

THE
FETID
LAKE of DOOM

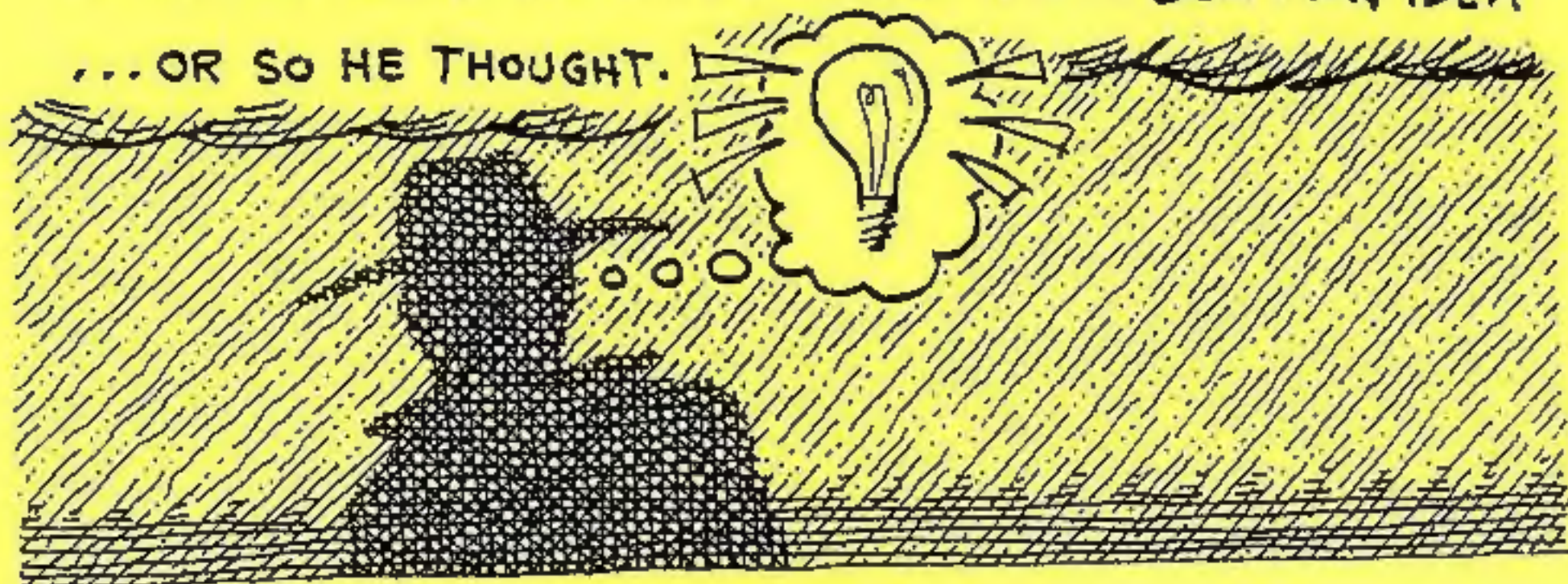
ACTUALLY, CALLING IT THE "FETID LAKE OF DOOM" IS A MISNOMER. YES, IT IS FETID. YES, TO APPROACH IT IS TO TEMPT THE FORCES OF DOOM. BUT IT IS NOT REALLY A LAKE. IT IS AN ESTUARY THAT HAS BEEN DAMMED (SOME SAY DAMNED) FOR NEARLY 60 YEARS.



THE FETID LAKE OF DOOM, OR FL0D AS THOSE OF US "IN-THE-KNOW" CALL IT, WAS CREATED IN 1949 BY THE STATE OF WASHINGTON AS PART OF THE STATE CAPITAL CAMPUS IN OLYMPIA. THE ARTIFICIAL LAKE WAS MEANT TO ENHANCE THE APPEARANCE OF THE AUDACIOUS SPLENDOR OF THE GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS. IT WAS CALLED "CAPITOL LAKE." SOME BLISSFULLY UNAWARE PEOPLE STILL CALL IT BY THAT NAME.

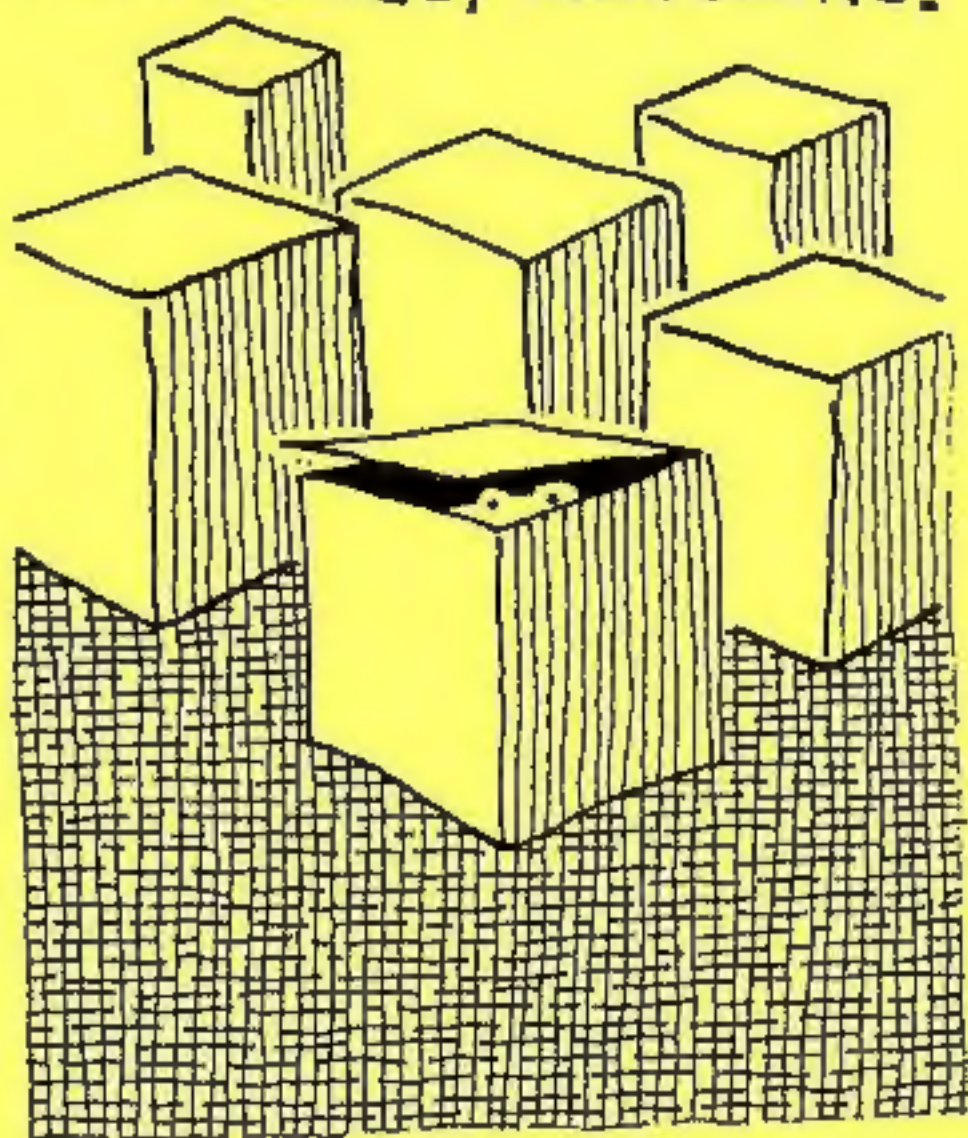


ANYWAY, WHEN THE BIG ODOMETER CLICKED TO CENTURY 21, THE FUTURE OF THE "LAKE" CAME INTO QUESTION. SOME ACTIVISTS AGITATED FOR RETURNING THE FLOD TO AN ESTUARY. BUT OUR SUBJECT HAD A BETTER IDEA ... OR SO HE THOUGHT.



HE PLACED A MAIL ORDER TO A SOUTH AMERICAN CAIMAN DISTRIBUTOR...

SOON HE RECEIVED SEVERAL CRATES CONTAINING NUMEROUS YOUNG CAIMANS. AND THEY WERE SURPRISINGLY INEXPENSIVE!



THE INTENTION WAS TO MAKE CAPITOL LAKE A MORE EXCITING AND INTERESTING PLACE TO VISIT. AND TOURISM WOULD SOAR. THE ELEMENT OF DANGER WOULD ADD SOME SPICE TO THAT BODY OF WATER. THE INTENTION WAS GOOD...

...BUT THE RESULTS WERE NOT.

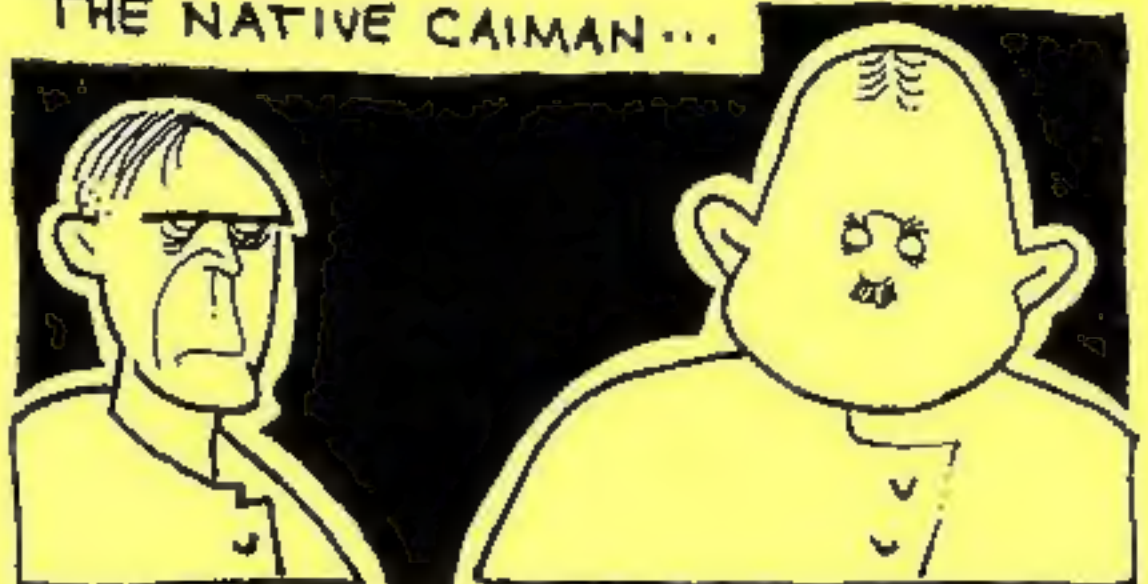


EVEN AS HE WATCHED THOSE SQUIGGLY LITTLE CAIMANS VANISH UNDER THE LAKE'S MURKY SURFACE AS HE RELEASED THEM ONE MOONLIT NIGHT IN THE LATE SUMMER OF 2005, HE HAD A SICK FEELING HE WAS MAKING A HORRIBLE MISTAKE.



HERE'S WHAT HE DIDN'T LEARN UNTIL IT WAS TOO LATE: THESE WERE ÜBER CAIMANS.

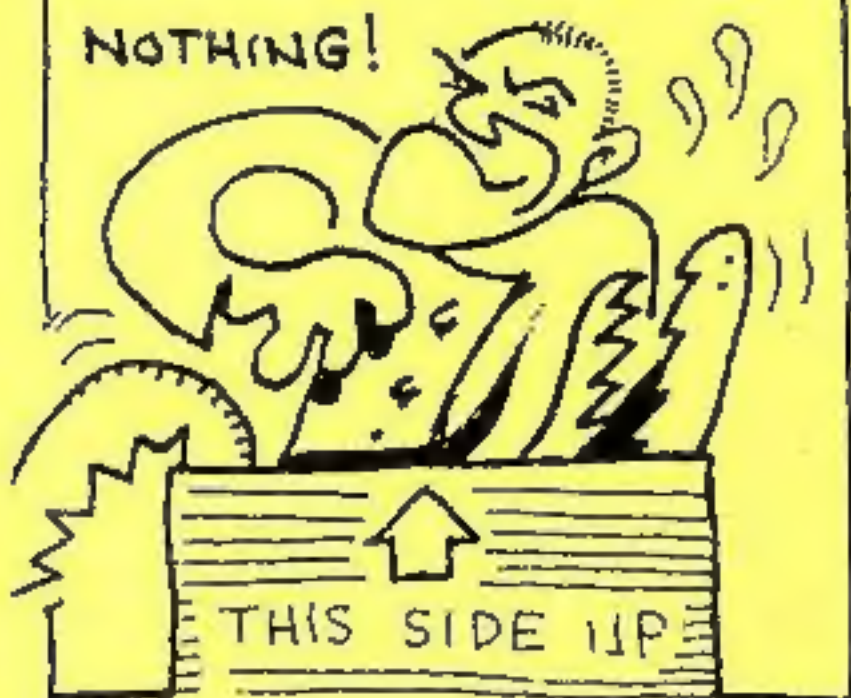
AT ABOUT THE SAME TIME THE STATE DECIDED TO TINKER WITH NATURE AND CREATE AN ARTIFICIAL LAKE IN OLYMPIA, ESCAPED NAZI SCIENTISTS IN SOUTH AMERICA WERE GENETICALLY EXPERIMENTING WITH THE NATIVE CAIMAN...



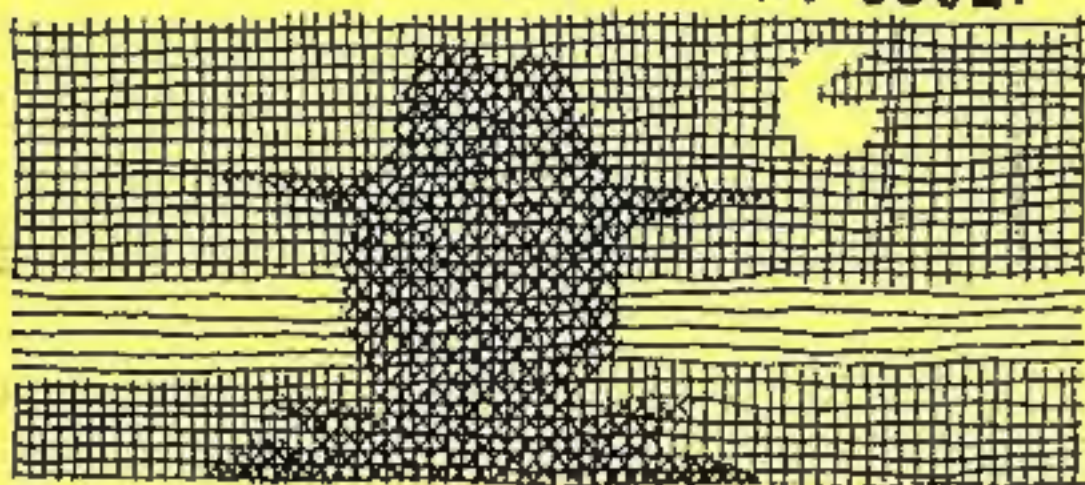
... CREATING A TOUGHER, MEANER, SMARTER GIANT REPTILE. THE CURRENT GENERATION OF CAIMANS WERE SO MEAN AND SMART THAT THE NAZIS GREW FRIGHTENED OF THEIR OWN CREATION.



THEY WERE MORE THAN HAPPY TO SEND HIM THE ENTIRE LOT FOR ALMOST NOTHING!



THE ARTIFICIAL LAKE AND THE ÜBER CAIMANS. TWO UNHOLY EXPERIMENTS OF NATURE. AND HE HAD TO BE THE ONE TO BRING THEM TOGETHER. MAY GOD HAVE MERCY ON HIS SOUL.



THEN, AS IF ALMOST ON CUE, THE USNS FISHER MADE A STOP IN THE PORT OF OLYMPIA. AS FATE WOULD HAVE IT, THE FISHER CONTAINED DEPLETED URANIUM. AND THE CAIMANS SWAM TOO CLOSE TO THE SHIP ...



... AND AS A RESULT
DEVELOPED OPPOSABLE
THUMBS OVERNIGHT.

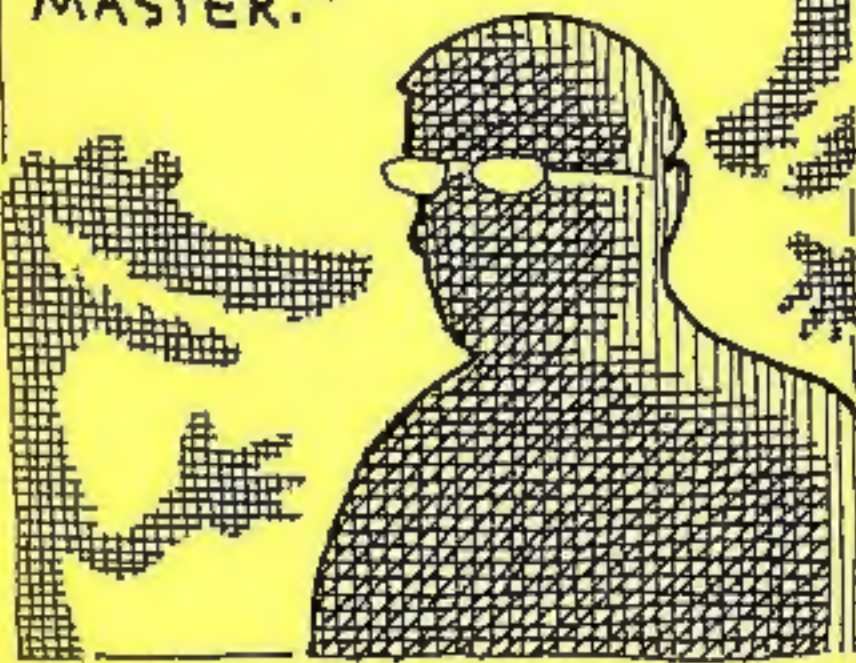
HEH-HEH!



IN A VERY SHORT TIME THE
CAIMANS BEGAN WALKING THE
STREETS OF OLYMPIA AT NIGHT.
THEY APPEAR TO BE PREPARING
SOME GRAND PLAN.



THEY HAVE A MYSTERIOUS
HUMAN OPERATIVE KNOWN
ONLY AS "THE CAIMAN
MASTER."



HE WAS SEEN UNLOADING CRATES
NEAR THE LAKE A SHORT TIME
BEFORE THE NEWS MEDIA
REVEALED THE EXISTENCE OF THE
SOUTH AMERICAN NUTRIA
(SWAMP RAT) IN THAT AREA.



NEEDLESS TO SAY, ~~RICK~~
THE "CAIMAN MASTER" KNEW
THE NUTRIA'S NATURAL
PREDATOR AND WAS SUPPLYING
HIS PALS WITH THEIR
FAVORITE FOOD ...

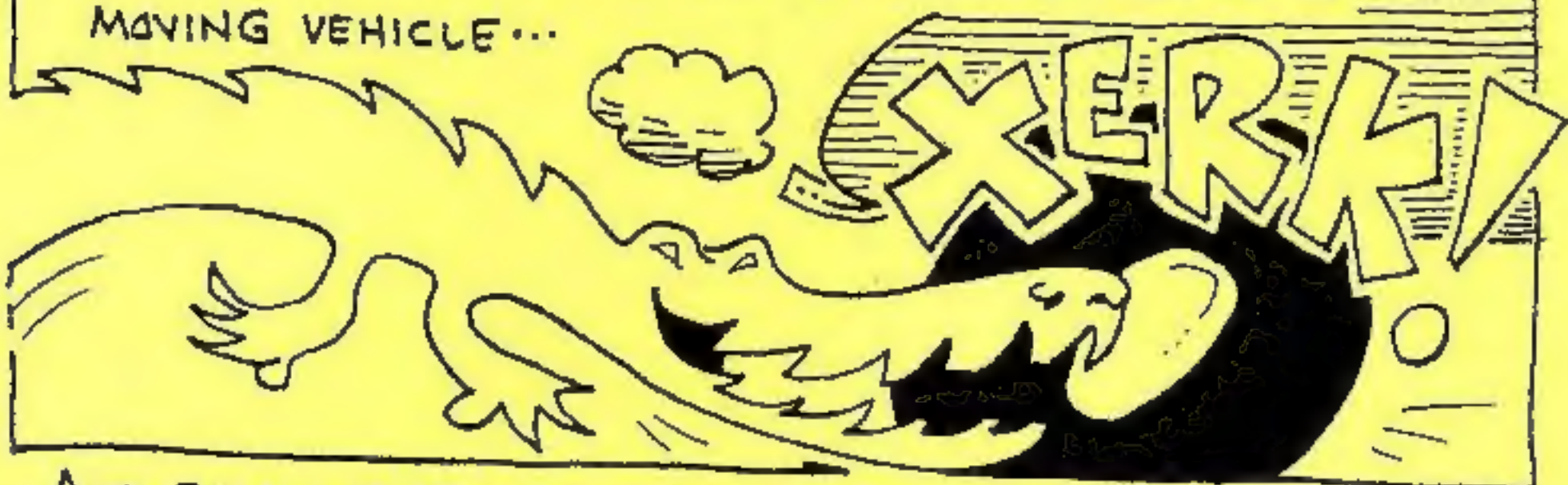
THANK YOU ~~RICK~~
"CAIMAN MASTER"
FOR THIS FOOD I
AM ABOUT TO RECEIVE.



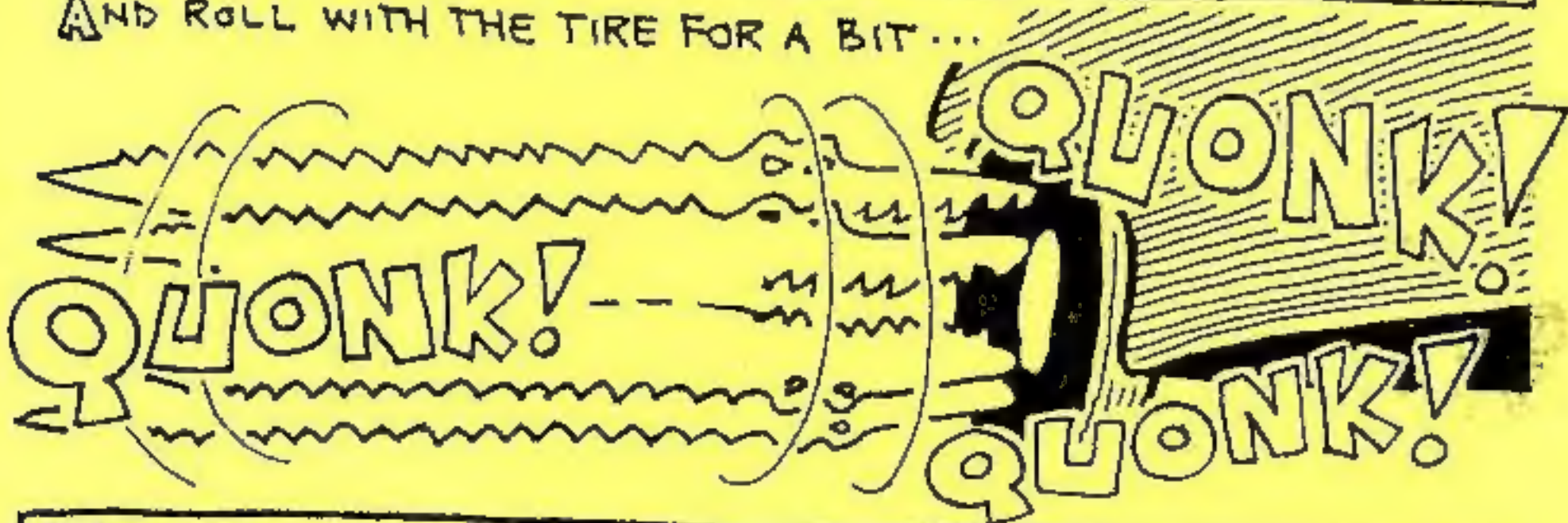
DURING THE DAY, THE CAIMANS HIDE OUT IN A MASSIVE NETWORK OF TUNNELS. OCCASIONALLY ONE WILL RUN OUT TO DESCHUTES PARKWAY IN ORDER TO EXPERIENCE SOMETHING CALLED "THE CAIMAN DEATH ROLL."



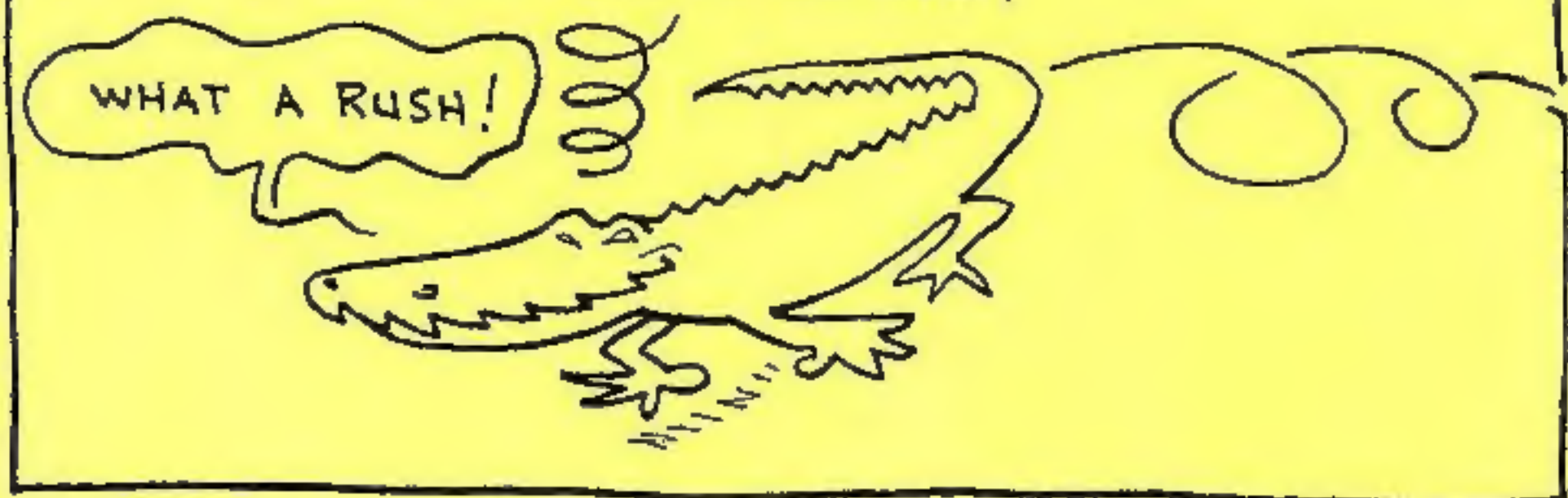
THEY BITE THEIR SHARP TEETH INTO THE TIRE OF A MOVING VEHICLE...



AND ROLL WITH THE TIRE FOR A BIT...



THEN QUICKLY RETURN TO THE LAKE.



CAIMANS ARE NOT AN ALLEGORY FOR ANYTHING. SOMETIMES A CAIMAN IS JUST A CAIMAN. AND **HE** BROUGHT THEM HERE.

BUT WE SHOULDN'T BE TOO HARD ON HIM. HE WAS WELL-MEANING. HE ISN'T REALLY A BAD GUY ONCE YOU GET TO KNOW HIM...



OK, OK. IT'S ME. I'M THAT GUY. AND I SCREWED UP. ALL I CAN REALLY SAY IN MY DEFENSE IS...

OOPS.



SW